

What's New from the USPSTF

Screening Adults for Lipid Disorders

This series of fact sheets is based on the work of the current U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). The [USPSTF](#) systematically reviews the evidence of effectiveness of a wide range of clinical preventive services—including screening, counseling, and chemoprevention (the use of medication to prevent diseases)—to develop recommendations for preventive care in the primary care setting.

This fact sheet presents highlights of USPSTF recommendations on this topic and should not be used to make treatment or policy decisions. More [detailed information](#) on this subject is available from the [USPSTF](#).

What Are Lipid Disorders?

Lipid disorders are abnormal levels of cholesterol in the blood that put men and women at risk for heart disease.

Some cholesterol is necessary to maintain cell membranes and other aspects of health. However, too much cholesterol can lead to heart disease.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Heart attacks kill nearly 500,000 men and women each year.

Cholesterol is carried through the blood bound to two types of "lipoproteins."

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) carries most of the cholesterol in the blood. High levels of LDL can cause cholesterol to deposit in blood vessels, clogging the arteries.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) helps remove cholesterol from the blood and helps prevent cholesterol from building up.

The risk for heart disease increases as levels of LDL increase and as levels of HDL decrease.

Lipid disorders are risk factors for heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States.

Who Should Be Screened for Lipid Disorders?

The third U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that:

- All men aged 35 and older and all women aged 45 and older should be screened routinely for lipid disorders. This extends the recommendations of the second USPSTF, which recommended that adults be screened until age 65.

- Younger adults—men aged 20-35 and women aged 20-45—should be screened if they have other risk factors for heart disease. These risk factors include tobacco use, diabetes, a family history of heart disease or high cholesterol, or high blood pressure. This recommendation expands on the recommendations of the second USPSTF, which focused on screening middle-aged men and women.
- Clinicians should measure HDL in addition to measuring total cholesterol or LDL. There is insufficient evidence to recommend for or against measuring triglycerides.

The third USPSTF makes no recommendation for or against routine cholesterol screening in young adult men and women who are not at risk for heart disease.

Why Screen for Lipid Disorders?

Heart disease may be the first sign of abnormal cholesterol levels. Screening can detect cholesterol abnormalities and lead to treatment before heart disease develops or worsens.

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Does Treatment Work?

Several large studies have shown that patients who took cholesterol-lowering drugs for 5-7 years and had either high total cholesterol or low HDL cholesterol decreased their risk of heart disease by about 30 percent. In the one study that included women, the treatment appeared to be as effective in postmenopausal women as in men.

Reducing dietary saturated fat and losing weight can lower total and LDL cholesterol as much as 10-20 percent in some men and women. On average, however, most patients achieve reductions in total cholesterol of about 2-6 percent after modifying their lifestyles.

The Take-Home Message

All men aged 35 and older and all women aged 45 and older should be screened routinely for lipid disorders to find out whether their cholesterol levels increase their risk for heart disease. Younger adults should be screened for lipid disorders if they are otherwise at risk for heart disease.

Clinicians should consider overall risk of heart disease in making treatment decisions. Clinicians should counsel all patients about changing their lifestyles (reducing dietary saturated fat, exercising, and losing weight) to improve their lipid levels. Many men and women, especially those at highest risk, may need medications to best control their lipid abnormalities.

Guidelines for treating high cholesterol are available from the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute/National Cholesterol Education Program.

Drug treatment is usually more effective than dietary changes alone for reducing total cholesterol.

More Information

Screening and Treatment

For more information on screening and treatment for lipid disorders, contact the following organizations:

American Academy of Family Physicians

11400 Tomahawk Creek Parkway

Leawood, KS 66211-2672

Phone: (913) 906-6000

<http://www.aafp.org>

American College of Cardiology

Heart House

9111 Old Georgetown Road

Bethesda, MD 20814

Phone: 1-800-253-4636

Fax: (301)897-9745

<http://www.acc.org>

American College of Physicians/American Society of Internal Medicine

190 N. Independence Mall West

Philadelphia, PA 19106-1572

Phone (customer service):

1-800-523-1546, ext. 2600

<http://www.acponline.org>

American Heart Association

National Center

7272 Greenville Avenue

Dallas, TX 75231

Phone (customer heart and stroke information): 1-800-AHA-USA1

<http://www.americanheart.org>

healthfinder®

<http://www.healthfinder.gov>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)/National Cholesterol Education Program

NHLBI Information Center

Attn: Web Site

P.O. Box 30105

Bethesda, MD 20824-0105

Phone: (301) 592-8573

Fax: (301) 592-8563

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/ncep/index.htm>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

The Heart Truth: A National Awareness Campaign for Women About Heart Disease

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/index.htm>

Detailed Information

More detailed information on this subject is available in the Systematic Evidence Review, Summary of the Evidence, and USPSTF Recommendations and Rationale:

- On the Web site of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) (<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstf/uspschol.htm>).
- Through the National Guideline Clearinghouse™ (<http://www.guideline.gov>).
- In print through the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse (1-800-358-9295) and the April 2001 Supplement to the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

USPSTF Members

Members of the third USPSTF are an independent panel of experts who represent the fields of family medicine, obstetrics-gynecology, pediatrics, nursing, prevention research, and psychology. Members of the third USPSTF are:

Alfred O. Berg, M.D., M.P.H., Chair
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